

Japanese American Citizens League - So. District Council
Report on Conditions at Manzanar Relocation Center - May 26, 1942

This report made after conference with following persons in attendance: Messrs. Kiyoshi Higashi, Joe Masaoka, Henry Fukuhara, Togo, Tanaka, Tad Uyeno, and Fred Tayama.

HOUSING: There is overcrowding far beyond reasonable expectation; the average barrack room is 20 feet x 25 feet, unpainted without ceiling, with wide cracks and knot holes in the floor, a single layer of sub-floor and knot holes in the lumber. From seven to as many as 13 persons occupy a single room; there are no partitions; there is complete lack of privacy, a condition particularly undesirable when as many as three or four different couples or families are crowded into one room.

Frequent wind whip up blinding dust storms; the cracks in the floor and eaves afford openings for the dust to literally pour through. A layer of dust blankets the entire room, even penetrating into suitcases and trunks. Hospital attendants say it is almost impossible to keep the operating table free of dust.

The "roofing" is an obviously poor quality of tar paper, easily torn by the wind; many holes can be seen. After one month's wear, the barracks already appear weatherbeaten. The heat of the summer sun beating down on the roof, makes living inside unbearable, particularly when a dust storm compels occupants to close all windows and door.

By CONTRAST: On the southeast corner of Manzanar, several cream-colored (painted) barracks, with regular standard flooring, insulated walls, provided with toilet, showers and wash basins; built on apartment style, are to be occupied only by Caucasian workers here.

The crushing effect upon the morale of Americans of Japanese ancestry of the visible, marked discrimination is apparent on every hand. In the first place; the tangible difference in housing standards lends weight to the argument that this is a race war, the color line is consequently drawn very sharply in the minds of Nisei who cannot fail to notice the difference as they walk by the Caucasian living quarters.

SUGGESTED IMPROVEMENTS:

(1) There should be far less crowding; for health, sanitary and morale uplift, no more than four or five persons, preferably one family, should occupy a single room. The number was originally announced in public early this year when Americans of Japanese ancestry were being asked to evacuate themselves voluntarily as proof of their loyalty.

(2) Present flooring should be overlaid with standard floor lumber to keep wind and dust out; the heating of oil burner, is absolutely of no effect so long as the cracks in the floor remain.

(3) Partitions for privacy: Married couples and bachelors are crowded together in a single room, without partitions. There is no furniture, no private dressing. Would any self-respecting White American submit to such conditions?

INSERT: Public health administrators say that all beds must be kept two feet apart; but this is impossible with 7 and 13 persons occupying the same room;

FOOD: The food is generally good and substantial, varying according to the abilities of cooks and serving staffs of different kitchens.

The children, however, seem to suffer considerably from lack of customary and proper food. Most affected are youngsters from 18 months to four or five years.

The food is served in a single plate of aluminum pan, shortage of utensils making it necessary for the entire fare to be served together; sometimes one gets such a combination as beef stew, rice pudding and pickled beets, each mixed in with the other. The menu is fairly uniform throughout the Center.

BY CONTRAST: At certain designated kitchens where Caucasian workers are given dining room service the quality and quantity of servings are marked superior. For instance, in Mess Hall #1, on a day when the lunch menu for residents was beans and rice, Caucasian workers, sitting in the same Mess hall at adjoining tables, dined on Top Sirloin Steak and green salad. The difference here again was obvious discrimination. The fact that such things are in plain sight adds, in our opinion, to growing resentment and bitterness.

The feeling among loyal Americans of Japanese ancestry here is that they are making sacrifices as loyal citizens they naturally expect any other American citizen, regardless of race, to make the same sacrifices under same conditions here at Manzanar.

Although Caucasian workers do pay 25 cents for their meals, the same privilege is not extended to residents.

EDUCATION AND RECREATION: As of date no visible evidence of school system has been seen. Many of school age have been denied school facilities for two or three months. The unanimous desire of residents is to see in operation as competently staffed education program this fall, if not before. Adult education is an important consideration which in the interests of community morale should not be overlooked.

We do commend the initiative taken by the local administration in encouraging the formation of ~~xxxx~~ classes in Americanization and the study of English. In any contemplated scheme it is the earnest desire and hope that accredited teachers of the highest standards be selected for the Center inasuch as the examples they set and methods they employ will be in a large sense determine the future outlook of their pupils.

The general satisfaction with recreational activities is notable, despite initial lack of equipment and facilities.

The free hand given residents in the organization of programs has been met with spontaneous response and a spirit of initiative as well as co-operation.

MEDICAL AND PUBLIC HEALTH:

A pre-evacuation medical examination was required of every evacuee. The examination in the opinion of many evacuees was a farce. Consequently, many known cases of tuberculosis have been found here, isolated of course, as soon as they are discovered - but frequently the discovery has come rather late. The danger of contagion is recognized by the medical department which admittedly is understaffed. Hospital facilities have been delayed, and the medical supplies have been limited.

The report of medical administration indicates one death by tuberculosis.

INFORMATION AND NEWS WITHIN THE CAMP:

At the present time, information is disseminated through two mediums;

- (1) Mess Hall Bulletins, typed and written in both English and Japanese and
- (2) The Center, mimeographed, thrice-weekly bulletin publication, Manzanar Free Press.

The Mess Hall bulletins carry administration announcements, chiefly covering regulations, rulings.

The Free Press, initiated in March, without regular authorization, by the public relations director, Mr. Bob Brown, attempts to be a newspaper. In this, however, it falls miserably short of being either a representative medium for truthful expression or a respected disseminator of news within the camp.

The omission of news, censored at the discretion of an administrative officer, ~~withoughtxxxxwithought~~ without reasonable explanation to either staff or inquiring residents, has built up in the minds of internees the feeling that room for honest, individual expression no longer exists. Democracy and the Americanization classes now in session, as a consequence, inspire a feeling of ~~xxx~~ hollow mockery.

The fault of this situation, in our opinion, lies in the fact that restrictions and limitations imposed by an apparently inexperienced young man with an obvious lack of understanding of ~~x~~ the background of evacuees and no understanding of their psychology; the fact that he labors under constant misapprehensions and his inadequate contact with the residents here, adds to the failure of the Free Press to date as a morale builder of any worth at Manzanar.

RUMORS are rampant, and the newspaper could render a valuable service in combating them; but the present policy of inconsistent censorship seems to encourage rather discourage rumors;

PRIVATE AND OFFICIAL ~~XXXXXX~~ VISITORS:

Personal friends are discouraged by the Administration personnel, and by regulations from visiting the center. Visitors can come to Manzanar and meet with evacuees only at the Police Station: they are not permitted to visit homes of the internees; they are not permitted to eat in the mess halls with internees; their time is limited to certain hours of certain days. The entire atmosphere lends itself to that of a concentration camp or jail. As one internee, a citizen, remarked after a visit from a friend: "Whatever official terminology that may be used to describe this ~~xx~~ place, Manzanar is a concentration camp."

The contradictory references of the administration officials themselves, who in one breath say: "This is not a concentration camp", and in the next, slip-up by ~~xxxx~~ referring to "this concentration camp", is indicative of the unfortunate approach to their administrative positions and betrays a lack of understanding of the feelings of Americans of Japanese ancestry.

OFFICIAL VISITORS are "personally conducted" through the center.

SELF GOVERNMENT:

The most important question~~x~~ that arises in regard to the proposed self-government arrangement here is:

"Will American citizens of Japanese nationals be the guiding hands?"

In the old order, out of which internees were evacuated, there was no doubt that the Japanese nationals, largely through economic dominance, controlled the affairs of the resident Japanese population...